

National Alliance for Public Charter Schools: New report shows parents more engaged than ever in education, and “never going back”

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The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools releases new survey data from The Harris Poll on parents' views on education and willingness to be “education voters”

In a new report, [Never Going Back: An Analysis of Parent Sentiment on Education](#), the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools examines results from a survey of more than 5,000 parents conducted by The Harris Poll in May 2022. Survey results provide deep insights into how parents feel about education, whether and why they've made any changes in how their school-aged children are educated, how their views have changed over the past two years, and the likelihood of their voting decisions being influenced by views on education.

The report indicates that parents overwhelmingly like and want the freedom to choose the best education option for their children. This is true across all races, political ideologies, and geographies. Parents experienced a first-person look at schooling during the pandemic never before offered to them, learned about education options, and began to understand that choice in their child's education is essential.

Major Takeaways From the Report

- Parents value choice—93% agree one size doesn't fit all in education. More than 1 in 4 parents are school-type switchers and 86% want options for their children other than the district school they are zoned for or assigned to attend.

- Charter schools are a popular choice among parents who switched the type of school their children attend.
 - Before the pandemic, charter schools were the most popular among school switchers; since the pandemic, charter schools have dropped to the second most popular choice, preceded by homeschooling.
 - Parents who chose to send their children to public charter schools report that they did so because charter schools exhibited characteristics of higher quality instruction (54%), smaller school and class sizes (47%), and better safety (47%).
- Safety is a number one priority.
 - Seventy-seven percent of parents said safety was absolutely essential when it comes to their child's education. By contrast, only 58% of parents cited quality of instruction as absolutely essential.
- Parents who switched schools are happy with the choices they made.
 - Eighty-nine percent of parents whose children have switched school types report that they or their child experienced a positive change as a result of the switch—namely that their child is happier (57%).
- More than 4 in 5 parents (83%) agree that education has become a more important political issue to them than it was in the past.
 - Eighty-two percent of parents would be willing to vote outside their political party based on the candidate's education platform.
 - For parents who vote in both federal and state/local elections, education is the second most important issue—second only to taxes.
- Support for charter schools is high.
 - Seventy-four percent of parents would consider sending their child to a public charter school if one were available in their area.
 - Even among those who might not choose a charter school for their child, 84% of parents agree that charter schools should be available to families who would choose them.
 - Seventy-seven percent of parents want more public charter school offerings in their area. This is consistent across political affiliation.
 - Eighty-one percent of parents support expanding the number of slots in existing public charter schools in their area.

The National Alliance commissioned this poll as a follow up to the 2021 report, [**Voting with Their Feet: A State-level Analysis of Public Charter School and District Public School Enrollment Trends**](#), which found that at least 1.4 million students left their district public schools during the first full year of

the pandemic. [Never Going Back](#) answers questions about the movement and motivations of parents who switched schools during and prior to the pandemic.

“Parents are a powerful voting bloc in our country; and those currently serving or seeking political office would do well to listen to them. This report shows education has increased dramatically in importance as a voting issue to parents,” said **Nina Rees, President and CEO of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools**. “Education has often taken a back seat as a priority issue in elections, but it appears this is no longer the case, and rightfully so.”

The pandemic opened the eyes of many parents to their children’s day-to-day schooling and, as a result, affected how they view education. **Eighty-four percent of parents agree that they learned more about how their child was being educated during the pandemic, 79% report that they became more interested in how their child was being educated, and 78% say they became more involved in their child’s education because of what they saw during the pandemic.** Lower-income parents and parents of color were more likely to agree with these statements.

The survey also found there are many considerations that motivate parents when deciding where to have their children educated. While instructional quality is important, far fewer parents identified it as absolutely essential than those who selected safety. Safety is by far the highest concern: **77% of parents said that this was absolutely essential when it comes to their child’s education and 59% said that it became even more important during the pandemic.** The second most commonly cited factor for parents is the quality of instruction, although it ranks nearly 20 percentage points below safety, with 58% of parents reporting it as absolutely essential. Individualized support for their child was the third most important factor, with 41% of parents citing it as absolutely essential to their child’s education.

In addition to exploring families’ educational choices and priorities, the survey sought to understand how education might impact parents’ voting decisions. **Eighty-three percent of parents say education has become a more important political issue to them than it was in the past.** This sentiment was expressed by respondents across all political leanings, with a difference of no more than three percentage points between any political party. Perhaps the most compelling data point from the survey: **82% of parents said they would be willing to vote for someone outside of their political party if**

the candidate's education platform aligned with their views.

Gwen Samuel, a life-long Democrat, education advocate, and mom from Connecticut, is one parent who recently switched her party affiliation to Republican due to views on education, saying: **"Our babies need schooling options now. Period. Education options help them move from surviving the pandemic to thriving despite the pandemic. I need to cast my vote for people who share my vision for expanding education opportunities for our future workforce."**

Parents' strong desire for choice and belief that "one size does not fit all" can even apply within a single family. **The Guerra Family** of Albuquerque, New Mexico enrolled their children in three different school models: a private school, a brick-and-mortar public charter, and a full-time virtual public charter school. Understanding their children's changing academic needs and identifying their scholastic strengths and interests guides the family when selecting school options for their children. Mom Ashley Guerra said, **"As a family, we believe in regular assessments of these attributes to ensure that the academic institution chosen is meeting the needs of our family and our children. This is why our children are in schools with different educational models!"**

As a special, autonomous type of public school, charter schools are uniquely equipped to offer more high-quality instruction, flexibility for teachers, smaller learning environments, and more individualized support for students—some of the very attributes many parents in the survey cited as priorities. Parents who were unhappy with their children's education and/or the learning environment say they were unhappy with the following factors: quality of instruction (53%), safety (42%), and level of individualized support for their child (42%). Unsurprisingly, these mirror the factors that parents previously reported as absolutely essential in their child's education.

Parents at **Digital Pioneers Academy (DPA)**, a public charter school in Washington, D.C., rallied the D.C. Public Charter School Board to approve adding high school grades when students were on the verge of graduating middle school and needed a high-quality education high school. **Founding parent Simone Scott** said, **"I am begging you to truly understand that our kids' hopes in themselves and their possibilities [will] continue with DPA as a high school. For you, this may be a decision of yes or no for a building. But for us and my family, it is a lifeline."**

Read **[Never Going Back: An Analysis of Parent Sentiment on Education.](#)**

National Alliance experts are available for interview and comment. Please email Jennifer Diaz (**jennifer@publiccharters.org**) with questions and to schedule.